DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 199 EA 019 801

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TITLE A Response to Changing Emphases in a Period of Retrenchment: Manitoba.
PUB DATE Jun 87
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, June 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Budgeting; *Change Strategies; Community Change; Educational Change; *Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; *Retrenchment; Social Change; *State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Manitoba; Manitoba Department of Education

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the politics of retrenchment in education in Manitoba, Canada, in response to public calls for government accountability. In a successful effort to enhance the system's educational objectives, Manitoba Education sustained a level of support that allowed the province's individual divisions and districts to revise their method of allocating diminished financial resources in the successful effort to enhance the system's educational objectives. In spite of shrinking resources for the province's Foundation Program and the Government Support to Education Program, a new, responsive, and expansive plan was developed and implemented. (JAM)

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A RESPONSE TO CHANGING EMPHASES IN A PERIOD OF RETRENCHMENT: MANITOBA

by

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EA019801

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (C.A.S.E.A. Division), Hamilton, Ontario.

June 1987

A Response To Changing Emphases In A Period Of Retrenchment: Manitoba

Education has always been a public concern and consequently decisions affecting happenings within the school system are made under a scrutinizing public eye. This inspection nonetheless is hampered, at times, by the absence of a formal process whereby pertinent data from school divisions and districts are collected and distributed to the public. The fault is not so much an attempt to masque occurrences but an infrastructure that pales to the changeable environment it trys to reflect. Despite such realities, programs supported by government are an earnest attempt to emulate the concerns of the general public as well as the public with a more direct interest in the school system. Concerns of such a diverse audience are, as one would easily and quickly conclude, anything but simple to operationally interpret and implement. Yet, the task cannot be avoided.

Within the province of Manitoba, the daily adjustments and response to vocalized public concerns is given in the life of Manitoba Education. Rarely does a period of time past that has not encapsulated a minor or major outcry from some sector of the public. The consequential fine tuning of the mechanism however does eventually reach a point where the string is too taut, thus demanding a complete overhaul. In Manitoba this point transpired on three occasions -- 1967, 1981, and 1985. On each occasion a completely revised and distinctive financial plan was implemented.

The intent and characteristics of each plan follows in an attempt to show the reader that the government by way of Manitoba Education has increasingly addressed the concerns of its public. This support given to the school system when available resources were and continue to be anything but increasing.

Foundation Program (1967 - 1980)

In 1967, the Government of Manitoba enacted legislation aimed at providing school divisions and districts a better and more equitable system of education. The mechanism set in place to execute this implicit mandate was known as the Foundation Program. Semblance of the Program had been operating however its erosion was well established by 1967.

The Foundation Program was financed by a levy on farm and residential and other property equal to 20% of the foundation program. The remaining 80% came from the consolidated revenues of the province. Together, the province provided a measure of equalization throughout its 57 school divisions and districts that surpassed earlier efforts. In addition, provision was made for teachers to improve their qualifications thus enhancing the potential quality of education that prevailed the school system along with incentives for school boards to establish optional programs and thereby increase the opportunity for individual needs to be met. One of the prime complaint of the prior financing mechanism was the excessive reliance on real property. The 1967 program answered with a substantial shift from taxation on real property to the funding of education from the general revenues

of the province.

Specifically, the Foundation Program was characterized by the following grant provisions -- (1)a teachers salary grant calculated on the basis of authorized number of teachers and a salary grant schedule. The salary schedule varied according to educational level and years of experience. In addition, limited provision was made for schools more than three miles from other schools, superintendents, clinicians and special needs teachers. (2)library, (3)print and non-print (including textbooks) material, (4)the transportation of pupils living further than one mile from the school and not residing in a city, town, or village, (5)vocational industrial and business education programs, (6)a basic per pupil grant, and (7)a declining enrolment grant to the extent of $500 per pupil lost for a decrease in enrolment of at least one per cent over the previous year.

A number of other grants were also provided beyond the Foundation Program. These included evening school grants, equalization grants, and northern allowance grants. The equalization grant was essentially an attempt to provide lower wealth school divisions and districts with greater financial support.

Over the 14 years that the Foundation Program continued to operate as the major instrument by which revenue was allocated to school divisions and districts, the gap between provincial support and actual expenditures of school boards widened. The Foundation Program became progressively less capable of responding to new situations and new needs in the school system. Furthermore, the amount of funding being provided outside the parameters of

the foundation mechanism grew each year as new categorial grants were added in what has been referred to as a "scramble" to compensate for changing conditions. The effect of having a sizeable portion of provincial funding operating outside of the Foundation Program eventually contributed to its demise.

Education Support Program (1981 - 1984)

The Education Support Program was announced in January 1981 and represented the first major attempt at reforming the financing of public school education in the province since the introduction of the Foundation Program in 1967. Unlike its predecessor, the lifespan of the Education Support Program was known at the point of its genesis. Its provisions were to emcompass three fiscal years and conclude in December 1983. In actual fact, the Program continued for an additional year.

A major dynamic in conjunction with the introduction of the Education Support Program which deserves notation at this time was the attempt of the provincial government to implement a major redistribution of real property taxation in support of education. The intention was to have the government absorb much of the value of the escalating special levies (sometimes referred to as local levies) for education into the provincial tax base. The announcement of the Education Support Program and the increased contribution of the provincial levy for education, however, was not coordinated with a simultaneous reformation of real property valuation in Manitoba. This miscoordination immediately set the effect of the Education Support Program on a sliding scale.

The absorption of the total levies by the provincial levy achieved the desired effect of substantially reducing the amount of education revenue derived from the special levies of school divisions and districts for one tax year, 1981. A sizeable increase in the value of the aggregate special levy for 1982 revealed a repetition of the Foundation Program phenomenon of a growing reliance on special levies each fiscal year. A further contributing factor to this phenomenon was the fact that the Provincial Treasury share towards the full value of the fiscal support for education was permitted to decrease. Amendments to The Public Schools Act, approved in May 1981 in the form of Bill 56, removed the proportional stipulation (that existed with the Foundation Program) and the annual contribution of the Provincial Treasury became the sole discretion of the provincial government. The Education Support Program momentarily stayed this trend but as history clearly speaks to us the Program did not bring about a proportional increase in contribution within the provincial budget.

Almost in apparent diffidence to the above fiscal situation operating support to school divisions and districts expanded in breadth and depth. What follows is a brief outline of this support as it existed in 1981 noting that incremental changes were made in the ensuing years. The operating support of a school division or district consisted of:

1. Basic operating support of $87,400 per basic operating unit. The number of basic operating units was determined by dividing the base enrolment (75% of the enrolment on the preceding September 30, less non supportable pupils), or where applicable the weighted

base enrolment (1.08 factor for divsions and districts north of the 53rd parallel), by 50 and adding one for any remainder.

2. Pupil support of $200 per pupil for each eligible pupil in excess of the base enrolment.

3. Transportation support of $310 per transported pupil plus 60¢ per loaded mile for mileage per bus route in excess of 50 loaded miles per day, but could not exceed the transported pupil remained as per the Foundation Program.

4. Special needs support which not only increased its recognition of coordinators and clinicans substantially but for the first time recognized "high" and "low" incidence pupils.

5. Vocational industrial programs continued, but to a greater financial degree, to be supported.

6. Immigrant education was supported for the first time; although applauded by some, the allocated sum came under criticism.

7. The print and non-print grant continued from the Foundation Program with an incremental increase in the assigned amount.

As was the case under the Foundation Program, the government provided support outside of the Education Support Program for evening school, English as a second language, and bilingualism.

Government Support to Education Program (1985 -)

November 21, 1984 the then Minister of Education, Maureen Hemphill, announced that effective 1985 the funding of programs for schools would be done under the auspice of the Government Support to Education Program. The Program, a year late in coming given the initial thinking of the developers of the Education Support Program, reflects in the main the recommendations set forth in the Report of the Education Finance Review.

The Government Support to Education Program allocates

operating funds to school divisions and districts through a combination of categorial grants, weighted per pupil block grants, and equalization grants. The categorical grants, as was the case under the Foundation Program and the Education Support Program, supporting educational areas of importance from not only the government vantage point but that of the public. Included within these grants for special attention are special needs, early identification, compensatory, vocational, curriculum materials and computer related support, small schools, English as a second language, French, heritage language, native language development, bilingualism, loss of treaty Indian enrolment, inner city, and transportation. Without replicating the entire documentation produced by the Manitoba Public School Finance Board a select few of the categorical grants are expanded upon here to illustrate the depth of this support.

Special Needs Support is the total of support for coordinators and clinicians (including 10% for administration in divisions and districts which provide their own services), high incidence pupils, and three levels of low incidence pupils. Although support is initially determined based on the number of pupils enro lled on the preceding September 30th, support is adjusted to ensure that additional pupils identified on January 1 or September 30 of the current year receive appropriate funding.

English as a Second Language Support. Commencing in 1986 enrolment in kindergarten and grades one and two is included for Hutterian schools.

Compensatory Support is funding for 100% of the costs of new approved programs. In most cases, school divisions and districts apply for funding on the basis of school level eligibility and programs at school level.

Programs are approved where the school's population is from families reflecting a significant percentage of low income, unemployment, low educational level of parents, mobility or migrancy, single parents, English or French as a second language.

Early Identification Support is funding to assist school divisions and districts in their attempts to provide appropriate educational programming to children with special needs upon their entrance into school.

Inner City Support is provided to school divisions and districts for elementary schools located in a city that have large numbers of pupils from families with low income, high mobility, lone parent or from families that speak neither English nor French. Number of pupils is determined based on the incidence of parents in those categories and support is provided for the school if the weighted enrolment exceeds 20% of the total eligible enrolment. Support is provided on a scale that recognizes that schools with a higher percentage of inner city students require a higher amount of funding.

The weighted per pupil block grant given to divisions and districts takes into consideration such factors as declining enrolment, teacher qualifications, northern allowance, teacher's years of experience, and economies of scale. Equalization grants are based, in essence, on the guaranteed valuation wealth equalization concept. This is to say, monies raised per pupil by one mill in the wealthiest division or district of the province also be raised per pupil by one mill in all other less wealthy divisions and districts, with the province making up the shortfall.

Beyond the Government Support to Education Program, additional support provided to school divisions and districts includes grants for shared services, non-residents, special needs (multi-sensory), institutional programs, as well as evening school, English as a second language for adults, and in-service.

As one can see from the above précis of the Foundation Program, the Education Support Program, and the Government Support to Education Program, the provincial government through Manitoba Education has been responsive to differing demands of the public school system. The degree to which these demands were satisfied did however fluctuate within and between each program. The fluctuation within each program due primarily to the financial ability of Manitoba Education. Access to diminishing "real" dollars hindered the degree of success the given program could possibly achieve; consequently, the intended mandate of the program was severed at the onset. Limiting resources did not however prevent Manitoba Education from maintaining a level of support that allowed and encouraged individual divisions and districts to continually move towards an enhanced educational system. In what can be looked at as an admiral stance, this stance did eventually create the need for a totally revised method of allocating resources to local school divisions and districts. A contributing factor that had not been alluded to earlier was inclusion at the prelude of each program of a grandfathering provision. The very nature of such a provision shortens, unless one is in a period of resource profusion, the extent to which one can shift resources to meet changing demands on the school system.

The fluctuation between programs is not surprising as existing conditions, as noted above, in the one program served as the instigator for the eventual implementation of the other program. As the then operating program became dysfunctional in

addressing the concerns of the public, a new and expansive program was developed and implemented. The resulting program was an encompassment of prevailing concerns into the major sector of the funding mechanism with add on provisions to recognize current concerns.